



Israel's Apartheid Unmasked - The Rise of the Extreme Right | Dr. Shir Hever

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza. And today we'll be talking to independent economist, journalist and author Dr. Shir Hever. Dr. Shir Hever is also the military embargo coordinator of the Boycott National Committee of the BDS movement. Shir, thank you so much for your time today.

Shir Hever (SH): Thanks for having me.

ZR: Benjamin Netanyahu returned as prime minister last December of 2022 and integrated a lot of far right elements into his party. Before we dive into this matter and examine this government in detail could you first deduce the makeup and composition of this government?

SH: This government has been called the most right wing government in the history of Israel. And that's correct, even though it has been said many times before, and it's correct every time. It's just because each subsequent government is even more far right than the one before it. And this one includes some of the leaders of the settler movement, some of the most violent racists; blatantly, outright and far right political activists, and some of them are absolute fascists. But the most important thing is that they are colonizers, that they support Israeli apartheid against Palestinians. And it's also interesting to note that the religious parties, which were not necessarily so much to the right, have become part of this government because they understand that this is now the ruling voice in Israel. This is now how politics looks like. And they want to make sure that they have access to the government, access to public resources. So they've joined the government, even though for them it's a theological compromise that I didn't expect them to make. But Netanyahu remains the smartest politician in the Israeli landscape. He understands exactly what the people want, and he's formed this government based not on a kind of realpolitik- what's the way to convince

people that he will rule well- but rather on this idea of ruling for itself: We have the power. We show that we have the power. We make no apologies to anyone anymore. And that's why these people, some of them are convicted terrorists, are now ministers in the government.

ZR: What does it mean to be actually far right in Israel? I saw the Tagesschau the other day and they even had trouble defining that and made a distinction between what it means to be far right in Germany and Israel. Is there a distinction?

SH: Yes, there is a distinction. And I think what in Germany is a word that creates a lot of problems is the word radical. Because in Germany there is a distinction in the way that people use the language between far right and radical right. I don't consider the word radical to be negative. The word radical from Greek means roots. And the radical left is not violent just because it's radical. It means that it asks the basic questions, that it wants to go to the root of things. The radical right in Israel is also radical in the sense that it asks the question, it's willing to take away the mask. And that's where the difference is. Because if you have far right parties also in Germany or in any other country in the world, those parties are often saying, Oh, we're not so different from you. We are actually just part of this discourse. Maybe we want to have stricter measures against the migrants, against refugees, more security, more military expenditure, that sort of thing. But in Israel, it's really different in essence. It's to say we're not offering a different policy than the policy of the liberal Zionist parties, the so-called center, we're just not going to lie anymore. And that's very interesting, now that the United Nations voted twice in November and in December that the Israeli occupation is permanent. And if it's permanent, then it's illegal. And it has to be checked by the International Court of Justice. And the Israeli far right parties, or I should say radical right parties say: Yes, that's correct. It is a permanent occupation. We're not pretending anymore. And in a very weird way, they are echoing the position of the United Nations. And interestingly, Germany is on the opposite side. Germany voted against them. Both of these votes with a small minority of countries that are still trying to claim: No, no, no, the occupation is temporary. Well, if the Israelis don't see it that way, then that makes the German position a little ridiculous.

ZR: Let us examine this new government. There has been a split emerging within the Likud Party, as well as divisions within the military about the policies of the most extreme elements. Can you talk about these divisions that are appearing now?

SH: There is a lot of complexity in Israeli politics. And if you want to cut through it and understand how things are operating and what exactly is the logic of Netanyahu's politics of control, then the answer is apartheid. And Netanyahu is very good at this because he understands that for Israelis, living in an apartheid situation means that they live in constant fear. Where are you standing in this position? Are you on the top? Are you in the middle? Are you at the bottom? And people constantly have to prove that they're on the top. So maybe you remember that it was broadly reported in the news that when the COVID pandemic started and the first vaccines were offered, Israel was one of the countries that had a very high

vaccination rate from the beginning, for a short time. And that was exactly this policy of Netanyahu. He was the prime minister at the time and he said, Okay, we're going to give this vaccine only to some people, not to everyone, not to Palestinians. And I'm going to get the first shot. And so if you're thinking in terms of apartheid, everybody thinks, Oh, if I get the vaccine that proves that I'm part of the people who are privileged. And if I don't get the vaccine, maybe I'm a Palestinian, maybe I have no rights. And that's how we got people to get vaccinated very quickly. And in the same way now Netanyahu says, Look, we're going to take the government, we're going to take the political positions. They are going to show us who's on the top, who's on the bottom. And now everybody is willing to do everything to be part of the government to get some kind of position from him, to show, Yes, we're part of the system. And it's based, again, on this idea, some people don't get access, mainly the Palestinians, but not only the Palestinians. Now we see a very strict policy of excluding LGBTQ + people from positions of power and even collecting names of LGBTQ + people in universities or in the media in order to persecute them. And we see less women in the government than in maybe any other government in the last 20 years. And we see every kind of minority being oppressed. And so within the Likud Party, which is supposed to be the ruling party now, there are also two classes. That's how apartheid works. Everything is broken down into classes. And within the Likud Party, you have some people who are maybe more supportive of Netanyahu, who also happen to be more white. It also happens that there are more European Jews. And there is a group of Likud members who are most of them darker skinned because their families came from Arab countries or from muslim countries, from Iran, from Turkey, but also from Morocco, from Syria, from Egypt. They're Jews, yes. And they're Zionist and they're right wing. And they support Netanyahu, but maybe they don't support him quite enough. And suddenly they find that they don't get any cabinet positions. And so they're saying, What's going on? We now have an ethnic division within the ruling party, and that's now how it works. But if they speak too much against it, if they say, Oh, well, in that case we're leaving the party, we don't support Netanyahu anymore, then that puts them in the position of Palestinians. So in order to preserve their position of power within the apartheid system, they have to remain silent in the face of this ethnic discrimination against Jews.

ZR: What about the military? Are they standing behind? Because traditionally, the military has always supported the policies implemented by, for example, when Netanyahu was in power. Are they right behind them?

SH: The military split as well. And you can say there are two militaries. There is the military, which is more the high tech kind of military, the drone operators, the pilots, most importantly, the intelligence officers. They hate Netanyahu. They oppose Netanyahu. And they have pointed out correctly that Netanyahu actually diverted public resources away from the military, cut the military budget and sent the money to other parts. And they oppose Netanyahu's policies in a very similar way to this part of the military in the United States, when Trump called for the January 6 storming of the Capitol. And the people who stormed

the Capitol were not those senior intelligence officers, rather the senior intelligence officers knew exactly what was happening and prepared for it and prevented that from succeeding. And so in that sense, the military elite, the military brass, the highly educated, highly technological part of the military does not like Netanyahu. They also tend to be more white Ashkenazi Jews, so Jews of European descent. Then you have the second army. The second army are soldiers who feel mistreated. And they're very angry because they say we have this dirty job of controlling the Palestinians on a daily basis. We have to stand at the checkpoints. We have to break into homes in the middle of the night and drag out children. That is how the occupation looks like. And that's the kind of job that most people don't want to do. And those soldiers sometimes, actually quite frequently, use deadly force against defenseless civilians and kill Palestinian children. And they don't get in trouble. One of the reasons that they don't get in trouble is that very rarely is there an investigation opened for unlawful use of force in that context or for killing civilians, because the officers are afraid. If they will make these soldiers accountable for killing the Palestinians, those soldiers, the second army will rebel. The policy of the previous government, before Netanyahu now won the elections was: Well, we cannot trust the second army. They could rebel against us. They don't like us. They like Netanyahu. So what we're going to do, we're going to use the Palestinian Authority and we'll talk to President Mahmoud Abbas, to send his forces in order to keep the Palestinians under control so we don't have to send these soldiers that might get out of control. And they do get out of control; not just might, they do get out of control. Now, Netanyahu comes into power and Netanyahu is taking some of his cabinet positions from that part of the second army, from those soldiers who say, Why can't we just kill everybody we want to? Aren't we better than them? Aren't we supposed to be the lords of the land? Or the way that they say: We're the owners of the house. The House is Palestine. We are the owners of the house. So Palestinians are not welcome here. They could leave and we can kill them if we want. By giving these soldiers the sense or the feeling like they are actually on the top, and not the more wealthier and educated and the technological soldiers, Netanyahu is playing a very dangerous game. And the first victim of that game is the Palestinian Authority, because now, who meets them anymore? And the Palestinian Authority, which supported the two UN votes that I just mentioned, the Israeli government is already punishing the Palestinian Authority, confiscating money. They revoked the travel permits from the minister of foreign affairs. So if the minister of foreign affairs needs a travel permit from Israel in order to go around the world, who can say that this occupation is not permanent? Of course it's a permanent occupation. It's annexation in practice. And then they put these sanctions and the Palestinian Authority might collapse. And the minister of finance, who is this far right settler, Bezalel Smotrich, was asked: How are you going to do these sanctions, and then you might lose the Palestinian Authority?! They could collapse and the Israeli government will have to take responsibility. And he said: Well, I don't want them. I don't need them. I consider them to be my enemy. But if he considers the Palestinian Authority to be his enemy, then the whole structure of the occupation will have to be rebuilt. And I don't think that the Israeli government has the tools to rebuild it. I think if the Palestinian Authority falls and if the Palestinians are rising up directly against Israel and are not controlled by this internal security force, which is currently

managed by Mahmoud Abbas, then I don't know what the Israelis are going to do, and I don't think they can. I don't think they have the means to do it. Because, what I said, the second army doesn't really have experience in dealing with this. They've been replaced already by the Palestinians. And the first army or let's say this army which has more power and more technology, they are not interested in that. They hate doing that. They're not going to start dragging kids out of their beds in the middle of the night and take a picture of them to check if they were throwing stones or something. That's not something they're going to do. Instead, they're leaving the country, they're forming private security companies and selling their expertise around the world. And so that actually shows that this form of occupation is becoming very quickly unsustainable.

ZR: How is the Zionist left and liberals reacting to this? Because we know from the past, they tolerated, if not openly supported, the policies of annexation and building new settlements or even going to war against Gaza. Can you talk about their reaction to this?

SH: Yeah. When we talk about the liberal Zionists, we're talking about the previous government, we're talking about Yair Lapid. It's a bit crazy to say that Naftali Bennett, who was the previous prime minister just before Yair Lapid appeared for half a year, was a liberal Zionist. Because he's also the leader of the settler movement and would be considered very much far right in any other country. But there is something that makes a difference, which is that these people believe that the best way for Israel to have its policy of occupation is to have two faces. To show one face to the Palestinians, which is a very hard face and what Lapid called an iron fist; meaning Palestinians are not allowed to have any political representation or rights of their own. They will be crushed every time. But towards the world, they pretend to be liberal and moderate. And Yair Lapid went to the United Nations and said: Oh, I support two states. Of course you can say that in the United Nations. He didn't say that to convince the world leaders that he really supports two states because nobody believed him. He did that to convince his own voters back in Israel that he can play this two faced game, that he can be moderate on the outside but harsh on the inside. And Netanyahu said, Well, that's nonsense. We can be harsh everywhere, we can show our real face wherever we want. We don't need to play this two face game. And that message was much more successful among voters. That's the reason that Lapid actually failed. These liberal Zionists, they are very easy to manipulate, very easy to tear apart. The first thing that they do now that they're trying to organize demonstrations against the new government is to split up. And you mentioned the Tagesschau. If you look at this reporting, the Tagesschau, where they reported about a big protest against the Israeli government. The camera that is filming that segment doesn't move one inch because they show the same eight people demonstrating. And we know that if they move the camera a little bit to the left, the people will run out. There was no big demonstration. It's a small demonstration. Because when they try to get a big demonstration, some people say, Okay, let's bring the LGBTQ + flag, the rainbow flag, we also want to protect the rights of those people who are being persecuted. No, no, we don't want to be associated with these people. Then others say we bring the Palestinian flag

because after all, Palestinians are the most oppressed under the system of apartheid. No, no, no. We can't have a demonstration with Palestinian flags. So in the end, they become a very small and closed elite group, which used to be in power. They lost power and now they're sad that they lost their power. But nobody sympathizes with these people for losing their access to control in power. And that's why they have no chance of succeeding. I think there's one thing here that's very important to say. Because there are six Palestinian civil society organizations that were without evidence designated as terrorist organizations by the Israeli Ministry of Defense, by the so-called liberal Zionists. Now, this was just an act of repression to deprive these people of their rights. But behind it is a civil society, a Zionist organization called NGO Monitor. NGO Monitor, these organizations that usually just call everybody who criticizes the state of Israel an anti-Semite. That's what they do on a daily basis. But specifically in this case, they created the dossier which blames these or accuses these six Palestinian organizations of terrorism without any evidence. They delivered that dossier to the previous government. The previous government accepted it without understanding that this was a bomb. This was a trap. NGO Monitor is an organization that is headed by a good friend of Netanyahu himself. Gerald Steinberg, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, is a friend of Netanyahu and he has created this dossier- apparently it is an independent organization. But in practice, what he did was insert this idea that the law, the legal procedures of a state, are also subservient to politics and to hierarchy. This idea of apartheid also permeates the legal system. Which means we are Jews, we are Israelis. We can decide that Palestinians are terrorists just because we want to decide that. We don't need a court system, we don't need evidence. And when lawyers said we're going to appeal this and we're going to protect the rights of these six Palestinian organizations, the Israeli minister of defense said, Well, then we will call the lawyers, supporters of terrorism and put them in prison. So, you know, there is no access to legal representation under these conditions. So that logic that says just because of our identity, we can decide what is the law is exactly the logic that Netanyahu uses against his corruption trial. Netanyahu goes to the court and they say, Well, we have evidence that you have taken bribes, that you have been involved in large scale corruption. And he says, Well, but I'm the prime minister and I have the power. And you're just trying to attack me because I'm the prime minister. But I'm going to change the legal system and replace the judges. And then the law will be what I want to say that the law is. And this is the biggest reform that this new government is doing. And they're using this precedent of attacking six Palestinian civil society organizations and using it now on the entire Israeli legal system and are saying, the government, because they're on the top of the hierarchy system, will decide who the judges are going to be, will decide what laws the Supreme Court can disqualify or cancel and which laws it cannot. And we will decide how the state attorney will make the decision when a politician has to face charges for corruption. And in effect, there is no judicial system anymore. In effect, there's then only the government and parliament and there's no third branch of government anymore. And using this success of attacking six Palestinian organizations without evidence.

ZR: I want to switch to the international aspect. Far right Israeli politician Ben-Gvir visited the Al-Aqsa mosque recently in occupied East Jerusalem, which has been condemned across the Middle East. For people who don't know, Ben-Gvir is part of Netanyahu's new far-right government, which includes ultra nationalists and ultra orthodox parties that are also calling openly for the annexation of the West Bank. Now, you've talked about the mask being unveiled. Do you think if that is the case, that there's a chance that the international community, countries like Germany, will have to change their positions? Because now people in these countries are even seeing the real mask of the Israeli apartheid system.

SH: Well, first of all Ben-Gvir, he's actually a convicted terrorist. One of those convicted terrorists that I mentioned before, who is now the minister of police, and he controls the Israeli police. His first order to the police: Take down all Palestinian flags that you see. Even though it is legal in Israel to wave the Palestinian flag. But he just decided he doesn't like that law and the police are going to attack anyone carrying a Palestinian flag. And when he went to the Al-Aqsa mosque, the title that he put on the little video that he published on TikTok, I think, was: I am the owner of the house. This quote that I mentioned before. Because the Temple Mount, which is the Jewish name for the Haram al-Sharif, for the area around the Al-Aqsa mosque is: Belongs to us. I'm the owner. And therefore I can go there. So this is the context. But you also mentioned the ultra-Orthodox. And I think we should make a distinction because according to the ultra-Orthodox theology, Jewish theology, it's strictly forbidden for him to go there. It's forbidden. And they actually published an article that said this is a problem for us, an internal problem, not about international relations, because you have to wait for the Messiah to come and for the temple to be rebuilt before we can go there and pray. That's the ultra-Orthodox. But his theology is not ultra-Orthodox. He's that new interpretation, putting the apartheid system so extreme that he puts himself above God. That's why, for the ultra-Orthodox, it's not easy to accept this kind of hierarchy where even God is not in the first place. Now, your question was about international responses to this, and I think we see this international response coming first and foremost, not from countries in Europe, which are very complicit. And Germany is very complicit in Israeli crimes and then Israeli apartheid. They will continue to keep silent until they have no other choice. We see the changes coming from other places. We see that mainly coming from the countries of the Global South. We see that from Middle Eastern countries, from Arab countries, from Muslim countries, which are very deeply offended by Ben-Gvir's provocation and threats against the mosque. And so that's something that unifies a lot of people against the state of Israel. And it's very interesting that Netanyahu kept saying, Oh, but I'm the best friend of the Arabs. I made a peace treaty with the UAE. Never mind that it's not a peace treaty because there never has been war between these countries. And he says, I will also have a peace treaty with Saudi Arabia. That doesn't seem very likely at the moment, but we don't know because Saudi Arabia is not a democracy and they can decide to do whatever they want. Even sign some kind of treaty with Israel and there's nobody who will stop them. But of course, when Ben-Gvir goes to the Al-Aqsa mosque, it makes it very difficult for the leaders of these countries to be seen as good friends of the state of Israel. And it makes it very difficult to

have a peace treaty with Saudi Arabia. So interestingly, there was a poll now in Israel that said 60% of Israelis support that Israel will stop building illegal settlements if Saudi Arabia will sign a treaty with Israel. And, you know, maybe that's a realistic, a political maneuver, that the previous government would have done in a heartbeat. The previous government was much more practically thinking and saying, Oh, we will freeze the settlement construction for now, sign the treaty with Saudi Arabia, build more settlements tomorrow; no problem. For Netanyahu that's different because Netanyahu is not about realpolitik. It's all about appearances. It's about theater. It's about pandering to this populist movement. So regardless of whether he's going to freeze settlements or not, you cannot say that he's freezing them. And that's the reason that now that the very extreme politics of Ben-Gvir are really challenging Netanyahu's government, he has to prove that he can control Ben-Gvir. And I think that is very difficult for him to do because Ben-Gvir's whole idea is: Nobody can control me. I do whatever I want.

ZR: We'll be examining the situation going forward. Dr. Shir Hever, independent economist, journalist and author, thank you so much for joining us today.

SH: Thank you.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. We are switching away from YouTube. YouTube has been shadow banning us and we are looking for ways to get out of it. So please join it and don't forget to donate so we can continue with our independent and nonprofit news and analysis. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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